

DPH Announces Three More Flu-Related Deaths; 45-Year-Old Male Had No Known Underlying Health Conditions

Dover – The Division of Public Health (DPH) is announcing three more flu-related fatalities for the 2016-2017 flu season. The three recent deaths push flu-related fatalities in Delaware to 14 – more than doubling the 2015-2016 death total of six. Of the 14 Delawareans who have died from the flu this season, 13 had other serious underlying health conditions. However, the most recent flu-related death involved a 45-year-old Kent County man who had no known significant underlying medical conditions beyond being ill with the flu. DPH was not able to verify his vaccination status.

During the last week of March, two New Castle County women passed away from flu-related complications. One was a 53-year-old woman infected with Influenza B, and the second, an 88-year-old woman infected with Influenza A. Both passed away at local hospitals and had multiple underlying medical conditions.

The death of the 45-year-old Kent County man who was known to be otherwise healthy is a reminder that the flu can be unpredictable and even deadly.

“Influenza is a contagious disease that affects the lungs and can lead to serious illness, and, sadly, as we’ve seen far too often this season, even death,” said Dr. Kara Odom Walker, Secretary for the Department of Health and Social Services. “This is a reminder that even healthy people can get sick enough to miss work or school for a significant amount of time, be hospitalized or suffer the most serious consequences.

If you think you have the flu, limit your contact with others. Flu is easy to transmit and you can pass it on to your children, other family members, friends, and co-workers long before you know you are ill.”

“DPH continues to keep its thoughts and prayers with the families who have lost someone from the flu,” said DPH Director Dr. Karyl Rattay. “The latest deaths are a somber reminder that flu season is still ongoing and taking precautions and recognizing symptoms of the flu are still as important as ever, even if you are not considered part of a high-risk group. If you’re experiencing flu-like symptoms, you should immediately consult your doctor, especially if you have underlying health conditions.”

As of March 25, there are 3,715 laboratory-confirmed cases of flu in Delaware for the 2016-2017 season. Of the 3,715 cases, 1,771 (47.7 percent) infected individuals are from New Castle County, 1,143 (30.8 percent) are from Kent County, and 801 (21.6 percent) are from Sussex County. These numbers reflect lab-confirmed cases and the actual number of illnesses is likely much higher.

DPH stresses that while getting vaccinated for the flu is the first and best way to protect against the flu, other precautions must also be taken to prevent the spread of flu-like illnesses, including:

- Washing hands frequently with soap or use alcohol-based hand sanitizers, especially after you cough, sneeze, or touch your face.
- Covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue and disposing of the tissue immediately. If a tissue is not available, cough or sneeze into your inner elbow. Droplets from a sneeze can travel up to six feet.
- Staying home when sick and not returning to work or school until you are fever-free for 24 hours.
- Ensuring all your loved ones are vaccinated against the

flu.

- Taking anti-virals as prescribed by your doctor.

If you are receiving treatment in a long-term care facility or in-home care, ask if the staff is vaccinated against the flu and if not, be certain all non-vaccinated staff members wear a mask at all times. Visits at home or in a facility should be limited if the visitor is under age 16, has the flu, or is at risk of exposure to the flu. The illness can be transmitted prior to someone showing symptoms. If you are living with a senior and a family member contracts the flu, keep the two separate as much as possible and ensure everyone in the home follows sanitary precautions.

DPH recommends that people with flu-like illnesses call – not visit – their medical providers, who may be able to prescribe anti-viral medications by phone.

For more information on influenza prevention, diagnosis and treatment, visit flu.delaware.gov or call DPH at 800-282-8672.

A person who is deaf, hard-of-hearing, deaf-blind or speech-disabled can call the DPH phone number above by using TTY services. Dial 7-1-1 or 800-232-5460 to type your conversation to a relay operator, who reads your conversation to a hearing person at DPH. The relay operator types the hearing person's spoken words back to the TTY user. To learn more about TTY availability in Delaware, visit <http://delawarerelay.com>.

Delaware Health and Social Services is committed to improving the quality of the lives of Delaware's citizens by promoting health and well-being, fostering self-sufficiency, and protecting vulnerable populations. DPH, a division of DHSS, urges Delawareans to make healthier choices with the 5-2-1 Almost None campaign: eat 5 or more fruits and vegetables each day, have no more than 2 hours of recreational screen time each day (includes TV, computer, gaming), get 1 or more hours of physical activity each day, and drink almost no sugary

beverages .